

VANITY FAIR

MARCH 2019

Spring Style Special!

MILEY RISING

“If you think I’m
a rebel without a cause,
you aren’t paying
enough attention.”

By ZACH BARON

Photographs by RYAN MCGINLEY

Plus

- **SELMA BLAIR**
FINDS *her* SUPERPOWER
- **10 BREAKOUT STARS**
STAND UP—and STAND OUT
- **ZAZIE BEETZ**
WEARS *all the* HATS!

Exclusive

**FACEBOOK’S
SHADOW
GOVERNMENT**

**DON
WINSLOW
ON THE
EL CHAPO
TRIAL**

**THE
BILLIONAIRE
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COUP**





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BY ZACH BARON
PHOTOGRAPHS BY RYAN MCGINLEY
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CYRUS PHOTOGRAPHED BY RYAN MCGINLEY; DRESS BY CELINE BY HEDI SLIMANE; HARRIS PHOTOGRAPHED BY MICAIAH CARTER; CLOTHING BY GUCCI; RINGS BY DAVID YURMAN AND NIKOLAI ROSE. FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS

On the
Cover



Miley Cyrus wears a gown by **GUCCI**; necklaces by **Cartier**. Hair products by **Rodin by Recine**. Makeup by **MAC**. Nail enamel by **CHANEL**. Hair by Bob Recine. Makeup by James Kaliardos. Manicure by Gina Edwards. Tailor, Tina Manners. Produced on location by Hen's Tooth Productions. Styled by Samira Nasr. Photographed exclusively for V.F. by Ryan McGinley in Miami. For details, go to VF.com/credits.

FACEBOOK'S FIGHT

Number of Hate Posts Purged

4Q 2017	1,600,000
3Q 2018	2,900,000

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Contributors



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—4

① *Ryan* McGINLEY

“Miley Everlasting,” p. 82

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McGinley, who had a solo show at the Whitney at age 25, photographed Miley Cyrus outside an industrial sand plant in the Everglades, where the two listened to music, danced, and shared pictures of their pets. Cyrus once bought one of McGinley’s photos at a gala for AIDS research, outbidding Tom Ford. “**I’ve always had a big place in my heart for her,**” says the photographer.

### ② *Zach* BARON

“Miley Everlasting,” p. 82

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“There are so few artists who actually command the attention of the country, and **Miley Cyrus has been one of them** for nearly a decade,” says Baron, a staff writer at *GQ* who toured Versace’s Miami mansion with the singer. “Everyone acts extremely strange and self-conscious the second they see her, which is always fascinating for a writer.”

③ *Karan* MAHAJAN

“The God of Corrupt Things,” p. 126

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“As an Indian, **I’m fascinated by the role Indians have played as middlemen in Africa,**” says Mahajan. He was particularly drawn to the story of the Gupta brothers in South Africa “and the ways they broke with or exaggerated that dynamic.” Mahajan’s novel *The Association of Small Bombs* was a finalist for the 2016 National Book Award.

### ④ *Kenzie* BRYANT

“Rad Hatter,” p. 112

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Bryant, a staff writer at *Vanity Fair* since 2016, was blown away while interviewing *Atlanta* star Zazie Beetz. “**I feel like I grew as a person while talking to her,**” says Bryant. “She has a bright future as a life coach if this acting thing doesn’t work out.”

PHOTOGRAPHS COURTESY OF ZACH BARON [2], BY LAUREN MARGIT JONES [4], COURTESY OF RYAN MCGINLEY STUDIOS [1], BY BRISCOE SAVOY [3]

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The Elements of Style

A big part of the fun of editing *Vanity Fair* is that, through our reporting and our events, I have the opportunity to meet actors I've long admired on-screen. This January, I met Selma Blair. As Julie Miller writes in her profile, Selma was a fashion muse before celebrity stylists were a thing; her innate style sense and strength of personality made her a natural fit for designers, from Karl Lagerfeld to Stella McCartney. Last year, Selma was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, after five years or so of enduring mysterious symptoms that she could neither explain nor get anyone to take seriously, including, for quite some time, herself. She is a working single parent who is now also a powerful voice for people coping with the practical challenges brought about by physical disabilities. And she is just as worthy of the label "fashion muse" as she was when her career was beginning, two decades ago. That's why we wanted to feature her in our spring Style Issue, with iconic black-and-white portraits shot by Cass Bird. Selma speaks eloquently of the transformative power of fashion, the way it affirms and expresses one's identity, and she has taken her diagnosis as a chance to speak up for people who might feel unseen or underserved by the fashion industry, as well as the world at large. She has become more ambitious both in her advocacy and her acting, all while remaining her sharp, witty, adventurous self. My admiration for her only grows.

As it does for Miley Cyrus, our cover star. At 26, she's over-indexed on accomplishments. (I write this letter the morning after she shared the stage with Dolly Parton at the Grammys and acquitted herself beautifully on a duet of "Jolene," which makes her pretty much a goddess in my book.) But she's also grown out of her child stardom into some very adult circumstances, which run the gamut from catastrophic to celebratory: the loss

Above: V.F. executive fashion director Samira Nasr styles Miley Cyrus during the shoot, in Miami.
Right: Ryan McGinley photographs Cyrus.



of the Malibu home she and Liam Hemsworth shared, in the Woolsey fire last autumn, followed by her marriage to Hemsworth in December. Those two events are related, she tells Zach Baron, in a profile that ranges from her new album-in-progress to her sexuality to, yes, that controversial *Vanity Fair* photograph 11 years ago. The heartbreak over their home became a sort of glue between them. She doesn't mention a phoenix rising from the ashes, but she doesn't have to: Ryan McGinley captures that spirit in his photographs of her, a woman in her element, whatever that element may be. Her style is as versatile as her talent; she talks with Zach in vintage Versace, bares her heart in Saint Laurent, and wades into warm Miami waters in Chanel.

Then there's Zazie Beetz, whom you may know from her starring roles in FX's *Atlanta* or *Deadpool 2*, but who wears lots of hats these days, both on-screen (with upcoming roles in *X-Force* and *Joker*) and in our shoot (also by Cass Bird, this time in dreamy color). Riding the subways of New York City, Zazie commutes effortlessly between chic and sweet. She's got a huge year ahead, along with all the rising stars in this issue, but in our eyes they're already tops.

RADHIKA JONES, *Editor in Chief*

PHOTOGRAPHS: TOP, COURTESY OF RYAN MCGINLEY STUDIOS; BOTTOM, BY CLINTON CARGILL

Miley EVE



Miley Cyrus,
photographed in
Miami.

RLASTING

A FLASH MARRIAGE. A NEW HOME, *after a*
HEARTBREAKING LOSS. *The* POP PROVOCATEUR *is still*
FIGURING OUT *who* SHE IS, *in* REAL TIME—
and THAT'S HOW SHE WANTS IT *By* ZACH BARON

Photographs by RYAN MCGINLEY

Styled by SAMIRA NASR

Before we begin,

Miley Cyrus would like to read something she's written. She's not sure what to call it, actually. At one point she says "op-ed," but it's not an op-ed. Statement? It's kind of a statement. She's trying to explain herself. In November, her home in Malibu, the one she shared with her partner, Liam Hemsworth, along with two pigs, two horses, four cats, and seven dogs, burned to the ground. About a month and a half later, right around Christmas, she and Hemsworth got married. She's still trying to make sense of it all—how one thing led to the other.

Cyrus recently turned 26. The debut episode of *Hannah Montana*, the Disney show that made her famous, aired when she was 13, which means she's now been a public figure—a teen idol, then pop star, then pariah, and on and on, to whatever she is now—for more than half of her life. She's had three No. 1 albums. More than 82 million followers on Instagram—a number that grows by disconcerting amounts every day. On the day she announced her wedding: almost 400,000 new followers. This is far from the first time she's had to do something like this—to work out who she is in front of an audience. In fact it's all she knows, really. "I remember getting my license and it being a big deal that I was driving," she says. "Almost like the milestones in my life were milestones for America. It almost felt like America was a weird godparent, you know?" Or maybe, now that she thinks about it, it was the other way around. "I was so influential in kids' lives that I was like America's nanny," Cyrus says, laughing. "Like, 'Just sit your kids in front of me and I'll teach them how to be a good person.' Which maybe backfired on the American godparent."

In the time between *Hannah Montana* and now, Cyrus has experienced nearly every kind of attention this world is capable of giving—"the weight of a million eyeballs on you who will never have to deal with the criticism or the magnifying glass that we deal with ever in their lives," as her friend and fellow former child star, Ariana Grande, puts it. Cyrus has also become adept at disappearing when necessary. Last year, her plan was simple: hide out in Malibu, work on a new record, live life with her dogs and her pigs and her "survival partner," which is what she called Hemsworth before what she calls him now, which is husband. But then came the fire, which banished her from Malibu, and the wedding, which brought her back, sharply, into the public eye, and suddenly it was 2019 and Cyrus found herself with a story she didn't yet know how to tell. "Where I am in life right now is very complex, even to myself," Cyrus says. "So I wrote something that, in my mind, could maybe come before our conversation."

One night not long ago she was in bed—"It was 3:30 in the morning, and I couldn't sleep," she says. And suddenly the words started to come. She typed them out on her phone—from where I'm sitting I can see the text, scrolling down far beyond the lower edge of the screen. She asks if I wouldn't mind if she read it, out loud, right now. Her mind goes fast, usually—really fast. "The wilder I am, the faster pace I'm going," Cyrus says. But she's going to try to slow down. She's going to try to get through it.

"Sometimes I feel like you don't even know how you feel until you just let yourself go," she says. So here we go.

I try to be true to myself in every state of

being. When I can, I will stand still, work through, sit in, observe, and get to know exactly "who that is" privately. My creative process comes from feeling inspired by life experiences, not pressured by industry standards. I will never put my own plan before nature's, or jeopardize personal growth for professional advantage. That said, if it's a time in my life like now where I am publicly sharing my stories, my music, my art, "who I am" unfolds in front of everyone and we go through all of this together. When people hear my music they hear a fragment of time, something I feel or felt right then. By the time it gets to your ears I may have grown past it, but I am truest to who I am at that very second. That can be five thousand different colors and shades at the same time. I'm a creative vessel that thrives on change and evolution, I love to feel, and to feel extremes. Of course there's a little bit of a never-satisfied artist that lives inside me that becomes bored easily, so I move through life quickly. But I have a home base and center I can come back to, a calm and a peace. I can't be in it for too long but it's a place to catch my breath. That's the foundation I have had since the beginning.

For the time being, Cyrus's home is Nashville, where she has a house not far from the one she grew up in. But this week, she's come to Miami, because she missed the sun, which she hasn't seen in weeks, and because she had a photo shoot, and because she's always wanted to visit Gianni Versace's old mansion, which is still here, on Ocean Drive, and is now a hotel overseen by a lively Italian man in a black suit named Armando.

Today, Armando has seated us in a private dining room to talk. When our minders are gone, Cyrus removes a tiny vape pen from her Versace clutch and inhales a few times. She is dressed for the occasion so thoroughly—vintage Versace caftan, vintage Versace slides, vintage Versace earrings, vintage Versace watch, vintage Versace ring, with a Medusa the size of a half-dollar on it—that she blends in to different parts of the hotel, a superhero who hasn't quite figured out how to control her powers. When she steps in front of the hotel's bright swimming pool—the one based on a Versace scarf, and which took 50 skilled artisans a full year to complete—she nearly disappears, a shimmer of color against a shimmer of color.

She speaks like someone who is as interested in figuring out what Miley Cyrus thinks as the rest of us are. “I surprise my own self with my choices,” she says. “Sometimes I’ll even think: Why the fuck did I do that? Or, What got me there? What? Why?” She’s very sincere and equally non-linear. The producer Mark Ronson told me that she once attempted to describe to him the system she uses to keep track of her clothing: “They’re filed by, like, mood, color, and designer,” he says. “It’s like somebody told you they had a record collection, but they stored it by the last initial of the recording engineer’s first name. I was getting a migraine while she was describing it.” In the studio, he says, she’s the same way, how quickly her mind turns: “If my brain worked that fast or could take in that much stuff and process it at the same time, I’d be constantly on the verge of an anxiety attack, I think, because it’s a lot.” Wayne Coyne, the Flaming Lips front man and a frequent Cyrus collaborator, tells a story about a car ride they once took. “She would get stoned and have answers to every riddle there’s ever been,” he says. “There was a building that was a jail in Nashville that she and Liam were going to buy and transform into a homeless shelter and a venue. And—this was all in one conversation—she was going to buy an airline, that people could put their pets on, so you could fly with your pets, and her line was going to be For Pets Only ... She just gets excited. And all these things are possibilities.”

Conversation with Cyrus is a little like trying to tune a radio between stations, with different bits of song coming through. “I’d be really happy to just explain kind of where I’m at, obviously in my relationship, how the music can even kind of be very contradictory,” she says, in a rush. “But, like: You know my truth. I also wrote a lot of this next record before my fucking entire house burned down,

and my whole fucking life changed.”

It was Hemsworth who bought that house, years ago. But Cyrus, it turned out, had been there first. “You couldn’t make this up,” she says. “The first record that I ever made as myself—not as Hannah Montana, the first record I ever made as Miley Cyrus—I did most of that record in that house.” A producer named Matthew Wilder used to live there, and Cyrus worked with him in a studio on the property. Years later, after she and Hemsworth had started dating, on the set of a 2010 Nicholas Sparks movie called *The Last Song*, and then split up—temporarily, as it would turn out—Hemsworth purchased the house from Wilder without knowing its history. “And then he shows up, ready to move in. And the old owners are cleaning out the garage and getting out all these plaques and shit with my face on it. Liam showed up and was like, ‘What the fuck?’”

In time, he and Cyrus got back together, and she moved into the house with him. They had art, as well as most of Cyrus’s music, from 2013’s *Bangerz* on, stored around the property: laptops, hard drives, scraps of paper with handwritten lyrics on them. When the Woolsey fire arrived, Cyrus was in South Africa, shooting an episode of *Black Mirror*. Hemsworth evacuated their animals. And then, like more than a thousand other homes in the area, it was gone, along with everything in it.

The night it happened, she says, “I got the journal that was next to me and just started writing out what I was feeling. Some of the feelings did not add up with the others. Some of them were super-angry; some of them were relieved in a way, which feels really fucking weird. It feels like there were weights tied to my ankles and I was in the ocean, and someone just cut those ties, and I was able to float and be free ’cause I didn’t have all this shit attached to me. Anger, relief, sadness. A feeling of: *I’m never*

going to get over it, this is never going to end. But, we heal up and our brain gets used to imagining a worst-case scenario happening over and over again.”

They want to rebuild, but at the moment she’s trying to allow herself to experience life without a center. “I’ll never be happy that all those memories and pictures and things that I’ve loved are gone,” Cyrus says. “But to have an experience like this—I find myself feeling more connected to being human again.”

Getting married grew out of what she and Hemsworth went through, she says. “When you experience what we experienced together with someone, it is like glue. You’re the only two people in the world who can understand.”

Losing my home, losing that peace, was very unsettling. I didn’t go back. I felt like my roots got ripped from under me. I was working on Black Mirror in South Africa. The day I heard we lost our home, my scene was set at my house in Malibu. My character was having a panic attack, so needless to say the inspiration was there. Anne Sewitzky, the director, and I became very close, since going through all of this so far from home, she was really the only mother figure I had. Experiencing that together and in the realness of it all, we created something I think is magical. It’s hard for me to be proud of my work, I rarely walk away satisfied but I’m very proud of what we made. It really tells my story in some dark and funny way, as that show does, and as life is. To lose “everything” at that time—materially, because no lives of people I know and love were lost—Liam and I have also found a new bond underneath all that rubble. Going through a natural disaster, the grief you experience is really unlike any other loss. No more, just different. In our position it feels or looks like everything is replaceable and you can start again, but you can’t buy spirit. Our place wasn’t filled with expensive, meaningless shit, but art—a lot of which I made on my own, and by others, including personal letters and drawings from

Cyrus doesn’t much *believe in the* CONCEPT OF REGRET.

MAKE A MESH

Clothing by
**Saint Laurent by
Anthony
Vaccarello;**
necklaces by
Cartier.



ROCK STAR

Dress by
CELINE by Hedi
Slimane.

“I associate with male energy more,
because I maybe do feel
THIS SENSE OF POWER.”

Heath Ledger, John Kricfalusi, Joan Jett, Murakami, David LaChapelle, Ryan McGinley, and so many others whom I respect.

Do you feel different being married?

“Zero percent different. I would say that losing the house changed us much more than getting married changed us.”

So why do it then?

“We’ve worn rings forever, and I definitely didn’t need it in any way. It actually is kind of out of character for me.”

It’s an old-fashioned thing to do, in some ways.

“The reason that people get married sometimes can be old-fashioned, but I think the reason we got married isn’t old-fashioned—I actually think it’s kind of New Age. We’re redefining, to be fucking frank, what it looks like for someone that’s a queer person like myself to be in a hetero relationship. A big part of my pride and my identity is being a queer person. What I preach is: People fall in love with people, not gender, not looks, not whatever. What I’m in love with exists on almost a spiritual level. It has nothing to do with sexuality. Relationships and partnerships in a new generation—I don’t think they have so much to do with sexuality or gender. Sex is actually a small part, and gender is a very small, almost irrelevant part of relationships.”

It’s sounded at times like what you were looking for, in fact, was a kind of stability, or a fixed point.

“Yeah. Without feeling like you’re putting a Band-Aid on a bad situation and saying, ‘Oh well, you know, now everything will be better.’ Because a lot of people use marriage I think maybe for a cure. But like my favorite woman in the world, Hillary Clinton, says: We’re stronger together. That’ll make me get emotional. That’s what she meant by it. Like, who gives a fuck if he’s a guy, if I’m a girl, or if he was a woman—who gives a fuck? We really are stronger together. One is the loneliest number.”

Being someone who takes such pride in individuality and freedom, and being a proud member of the LGBTQ+ community, I’ve been inspired by redefining again what a relationship in this generation looks like. Sexuality and gender identity are completely separate from partnership. I wore a dress on my wedding day because I felt like it, I straightened my hair because I felt like it, but that doesn’t make me

become some instantly “polite hetero lady.” (PS: Straight women are badass, too.) My relationship is very special to me, it is my home. I feel less misplaced when we are in the same room, no matter where that is, but just because something changes in my relationship doesn’t mean something has to drastically change in my individuality. What Liam and I went through together changed us. I’m not sure without losing Malibu, we would’ve been ready to take this step or ever even gotten married, who can say? But the timing felt right and I go with my heart. No one is promised the next day, or the next, so I try to be “in the now” as much as possible. If I ever find myself thinking too far ahead, I acknowledge that anxiety and bring myself back into my body and out of my head. Something that helps me, when life is moving so fast that it’s hard to keep up with, is writing. Not just songs, but streams of consciousness. I let myself babble, and in all that junk sometimes there is treasure! Pretty much what I’m doing now. All the things we have ever learned or experienced are just stored away in the back of our mind. It’s important to daydream, to let the thoughts and memories travel in and out, and learn to recognize them. Not only their truth, but their lies. When I write out these thoughts, it’s nice to have a point of reference to see why I acted on certain choices or went down certain paths. It’s all just a way to handle, manage, and process experience. The way I feel can be so drastic moment to moment, perspective is everything. Time and place. Here and now. In a second everything can change. It can be scary when you’re not the one in the driver seat—inevitably sometimes we lose control. The key for me staying healthy and happy is by being the pilot and not a backseat driver. Thinking for myself. Sometimes that gets chalked up to an “I don’t give a fuck” attitude, but that isn’t my narrative. I do give a fuck. A lot of them, actually. Sometimes too many. I’m free and fluid with my speech, so by being this honest, I contradict myself sometimes, but like I said in that moment, that is my fullest truth. I live in acceptance of others and hope everyone gets to feel the freedom that I live in! People like myself have a hard time comprehending a middle ground, I thrive on extremes, but I am learning to live in that sometimes uncomfortable and itchy in-between. I

want to live a long life full of love, music, and adventure. I believe balance will get me there. Balance and moderation. Which sometimes is like a foreign language to me. But I am practicing. In that practice will come mistakes but it’ll shape me and I can’t wait to see who it makes me into. Like Bowie said, I promise it won’t be boring. How could it be? Life is like binge-watching a favorite show. What comes next? Can’t sleep until we find out ...

Cyrus is working on the next album—she expects to put out new music by summer. “There’s psychedelic elements, there’s pop elements, there’s more hip-hop-leaning records,” she says. “You know, in the same way I like to kind of just be genderless, I like feeling genreless.” This new album, she says, will be “just kind of a mosaic of all the things that I’ve been before.”

That list—of all the things Miley Cyrus has been before—is a long one by now. The first soundtrack album to *Hannah Montana* came out in 2006, when she was still a kid being managed by her mother, Tish, and working daily on set with her father, Billy Ray, who was also on the show. “No wonder I went crazy for a couple of years,” she says now, laughing. “But no—my parents are so cool. Both of my parents are big stoners. I remember one time the producers on *Hannah Montana* started screaming at me ‘cause they thought that I was smoking pot in the dressing room. And I was like, ‘I’m not fucking smoking pot in the dressing room. Go knock on my fucking dad’s door.’ It was my dad.”

Cyrus grew up around country musicians like her father and her godmother, Dolly Parton, and you can still hear it in her voice today. “Her tone is so identifiable,” Grande says. “With your eyes closed, you know it’s Miley.” Pharrell, who has worked with Cyrus since 2013, says: “When she sings, you feel so many of those classic textures and classic ways of delivering a song.”

A little over 10 years ago, at 15 years old, Cyrus famously posed for this magazine wearing only a bed sheet. In retrospect, she says, “that wasn’t like a conscious thought of O.K., I’m going to make sure right now is a good time for me to take that next step into adulthood

WADE FOR IT
“I surprise my own self. Sometimes I’ll think, Why did I do that?”

Dress, swimsuit, and belt by **CHANEL**; belt by **Isabel Marant**; earrings by **BULGARI**.

HAIR BY BOB RECINE; MAKEUP BY JAMES KALIAKOS; MANICURE BY GINA EDWARDS; TAILOR, TINA MANNERS; PRODUCED ON LOCATION BY HEN'S TOOTH PRODUCTIONS; FOR DETAILS, GO TO VF.COM/CREDITS



“I said I would move away if he
became president. We all said
A BUNCH OF SHIT
WE DIDN'T MEAN.”



FOR KICKS
Ariana Grande
calls Cyrus's
voice singular.
“With your eyes
closed, you
know it's Miley.”

Gown by **GUCCI**.



HIGH RISE
Cyrus says
“anger, relief,
sadness”
came over her
after the
Malibu fire. Then,
“we heal up.”

Pants by **Marc
Jacobs**; necklaces
by **Cartier**.

and piss people off. It just felt right.” But for a while, what felt right kept landing her, over and over again, in trouble. Her 2013 MTV VMA performance is now the stuff of pop-cultural—even presidential—lore. The day after, while Cyrus was staying at Trump Tower in New York, Cyrus woke up to a call from Donald himself, who wanted to congratulate her on her extremely twerk-heavy performance. “I loved it,” he said.

“And now he’s our president,” Cyrus says, sighing. “You know, I said I would move away if he became president. We all said a bunch of shit we didn’t mean.

“Because we really thought: Maybe people will listen. Maybe people actually realize how detrimental this will be to our fucking country if this happens. Obviously they didn’t. But for me to move away—what the fuck is that going to change? As someone who is so proud of being an activist, am I going to feel proud of myself just running away from, and leaving everyone else here to live under, a completely racist, sexist, hateful asshole? You can’t leave everyone else to fend for themselves.”

In 2013, she also released *Bangerz*, a rap-influenced album that contained her biggest single to date—“Wrecking Ball,” the video to which has been viewed close to a billion times on YouTube—and which established her as a major pop star. Cyrus made *Bangerz* in close collaboration with the producers Mike Will Made It and Pharrell, whom she continues to work with today, but at the time—and since, as she’s made the occasional skeptical comment about the genre—people accused her of appropriating hip-hop tropes and styles without fully understanding, or respecting, where they came from. In 2015, after Cyrus and Nicki Minaj clashed onstage at the VMAs, Minaj told *The New York Times Magazine*: “If you want to enjoy our culture and our lifestyle, bond with us, dance with us, have fun with us, twerk with us, rap with us, then you should also want to know what affects us, what is bothering us, what we feel is unfair to us. You shouldn’t not want to know that.”

Cyrus says that, in the years since making *Bangerz*, she’s tried to be more aware of where she comes from relative to others. “I think we’re so influenced by the people that we’re around,” she says. “And my community when I was working on *Bangerz*—Future actually wrote

on ‘Love Money Party.’ Those are the people in my life that I was really around and in the studio with. Future is fucking amazing and has a lot of wisdom, too. Just listening to him and Mike Will, who was going to call his first record *Made It from the Basement*—the way they grew up was obviously so different from the way I grew up.”

“She’s just from a different generation,” Pharrell says. “But she’s also a part of that culture where they’re across everything. They look at everything. And they don’t have some of the same sensitivities that we do. And that’s why you have some of the conversations with them, to explain some of the history, because some of those things are heavy. But I worked with her because I thought she was talented, and there was something really different. And still to this day, when she’s singing, when she belts a note, you look at her like: Wow.”

Cyrus says she knows she’s had an easier path through the industry than artists like Pharrell and Mike Will, who have helped her along the way. “My dad was already in the industry. I grew up on a fucking tour bus,” she says. “They are 100 percent self-made. That’s really inspiring to be around. And that made me want to be more self-made.”

For Cyrus, working on being self-made took the form of experimenting with other, more personal forms—not dodging the spotlight, exactly, but redirecting it, going in and out of touch with the world. Ronson recalls texting with her in this period: she’d go three weeks between messages, then send back a single emoji. In 2015, she made *Miley Cyrus & Her Dead Petz*, a loose, semi-psychedelic rock album she recorded with the Flaming Lips and released for free on SoundCloud.

In 2017, she released *Younger Now*, for which she wrote all the lyrics and music, and which is as close to a traditional Nashville record as she says she’s likely to get. “I wasn’t smoking weed and I wasn’t partying and I had gone sober for a year. And I feel like that was challenging the system as much as anything else I’ve ever done—to have a female pop writer that says, ‘All right, I’m only going to write all

my own songs. I don’t want to share lyrics with anyone else. I just want to write what I feel.”

Late last year, Cyrus recorded “Nothing Breaks Like a Heart” with Ronson, who put the song out in December, as the first single to his new record. “Nothing Breaks Like a Heart” brought Cyrus back to the radio, to Howard Stern, and to *Saturday Night Live*; it also made her think hard about what the role of a pop star might be, exactly, in 2019. In the video for the single, Cyrus drives a vintage Mercedes past various landmarks, personal and political: kneeling football players, strip-club dancers, a wrecking ball dangling from the rearview mirror.

“I love when pop culture and politics meet,” Cyrus says. “I think they’re not always married completely happily. They challenge each other. But I think especially in this time, pop

culture and politics are the same fucking thing. Especially with the president that we have right now. We’ve made a celebrity our fucking president. People listen to what celebrities have to say more than activists half the time. So, by having that platform, what the fuck are you going to say?”

Even in the privacy of the studio, Cyrus says, she is reminded of the way gender and politics constantly play out in every aspect of pop music. “Every producer I’m working with on this new record is male. There’s not a lot of female producer options for me. But it’s fun to be the female in the room that has the most say.”

Is that ever lonely?

“No, because I have such male energy. I think I associate with male energy more, because I maybe do feel this sense of power.”

By accident, even though there really is no such thing, I have done a weird social experiment. Art imitating life, and vice versa. That’s really what our “Nothing Breaks Like a Heart” music video was all about. The amount of disruption it causes to see a “female” living outside of societal norm. Where men can be praised, women are frowned upon. I’ve experienced that first-hand. The panic it causes for CONTINUED ON PAGE 137

ETERNAL FLAME

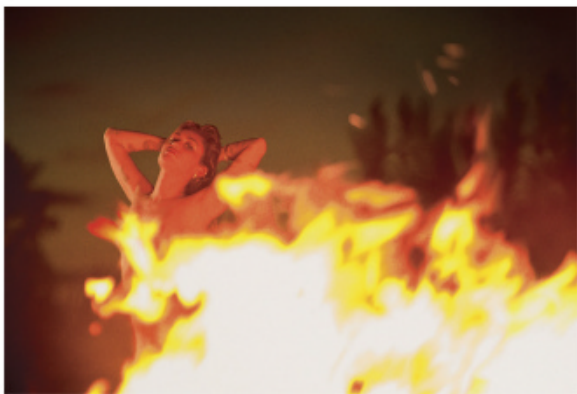
She calls her forthcoming album “a mosaic of all the things that I’ve been before.”

Dress by **Valentino**. Throughout: hair products by **Rodin**; makeup by **Recine**; nail enamel by **MAC**; nail enamel by **CHANEL**.

For more photos from Miley Cyrus’s cover shoot, visit VF.com.



Miley Cyrus



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 92 *me to perform wearing a men's Gucci suit, unzipped, baring my chest, versus coming out of my hotel greeting fans in a skirt with long, highlighted, blown-out hair. The "gold stars" I receive for being "pretty" and for following the rules are really discouraging and uninspiring, but that also fuels me. It inspires me to continue to challenge boundaries; and be myself, even if some days I know exactly who that is more than other days. How I feel can be drastic but life is fun, thrilling, and exhilarating this way. This year, I wanted to live carefree but not careless, if that makes any sense. I'm so thankful to my loyal fans who have been so supportive of every space I've occupied. Everything I do has a message and they've helped spread these philosophies. My fashion statements recently have been described as more "tame" than those in the past, but I actually think I'm challenging the system more than ever. Choosing to live as a sustainable vegan activist means wearing more vintage (less waste; loving pieces for longer), playing with the newest eco-materials and technology, and making custom vegan pieces with some of*

my favorite designers, like Louis Vuitton, Celine, Saint Laurent, Viktor & Rolf, Isabel Marant, Thierry Mugler, Gaultier, Vivienne Westwood and of course Stella McCartney—we went to the Met Ball together to use that platform to encourage cruelty-free fashion.

I've said it before, and in this I will always be certain: if you think I'm a rebel without a cause, you aren't paying enough attention.

That's my piece.

Cyrus doesn't much believe in the concept of regret. She believes it's all inseparable, in a way—how you dress, the things you own, what you've made, even the tabloid articles—it's all part of one unified project that is evolving in real time, the answers changing by the minute and year. If you do it right, it all lasts even when you're gone. Take where we're sitting right now, in the Versace mansion, in a dead man's dining room. "His spirit is here," Cyrus says. "Even if he's not here, the spirit still is." She asks if we can walk around a bit, so that she might commune with him. Armando says of course. He leads us deeper into the hotel. "This used to be Lady Diana's room," he says: parrots on the wallpaper, resplendent old bed. Next is the Mosaic Suite, named for the Medusa inlaid on the floor. "I'm freaking," Cyrus says. She crouches to take a selfie with it. Belatedly, she notices the TV attached to the wall, the bottles of Fiji water on the nightstand. "Wait, do people stay here?" she asks, just catching on to the fact that this is a hotel.

In a few hours, she'll head back to Nashville. Already, the machine around her is gearing up

for the next public iteration of Miley Cyrus. In a moment or two, she'll step outside, and a photographer will take her picture: her Versace caftan will catch the wind just so, and the next day that photo will appear on various Web sites and gossip pages, speculation rapidly spreading that Cyrus is pregnant, because, in her life, a mere ocean breeze can—and often does—become a news story.

Over the next week, I watch from a distance as the rumors turn to certainty, until Cyrus herself responds, in a tweet to the *Daily Mail*, denying the story. For what it's worth, this is what Cyrus told me about other people's children when the subject came up: "Someone really hypes up the kid. Then you sit and you're like, 'Yeah, it's cute,' but, you know, it's a baby. It kind of is what it is."

But then again, she admits, the only constant about Cyrus is how often she changes her mind. "There's this book that I was obsessed with that's called *The Untethered Soul*," Cyrus says. "And it tells you to get in a place by yourself and just be aware of how quick your mind fucking goes. You know how sometimes you're like: 'Why am I even thinking about this?' I have that tendency to just let my brain drive me, to let my wild fucking thoughts just drive me. But I really want to be the pilot of my decisions."

She holds out her phone, her statement still there in her Notes app, a memo to her future self, if to no one else. "So, I think if you can write down your thoughts and then reference them, you can go: 'Oh, well: That's why.'" ■

Selma Blair



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 123 *booze cold-turkey. Blair was flying back to Los Angeles from Cancun when she took what she thought was an Ativan (medicine to treat anxiety). The pill, she later learned, was Ambien, which is known to have behavioral side effects. Fatigued and dehydrated from a good time in Mexico, Blair blacked out on the plane. Tabloid reports said that she had shouted, and was taken off on a stretcher upon landing. She was humiliated by the press, and although she says she hadn't been drinking on the plane, she decided to*

re-evaluate. "It made me see things differently, and it opened up a conversation with my son about my own past with alcohol.

"There were a couple of experiences in my recent adult life that transformed me," Blair says, citing the plane incident as one. Coming forward two years ago with allegations about being sexually assaulted by filmmaker James Toback when she was a young actress was another revelatory moment for her. (Toback denied the allegations at the time.) "Just being free of that shame was huge," Blair says of the experience, for which she was named a *Time* Person of the Year in 2017, along with other "silence breakers" in Hollywood. "And then another was being diagnosed with M.S. The doctor said, 'Your life will forever be different.' And I was like, 'Well, thank God.'"

Throughout the course of our three-hour conversation, Blair offers only one complaint about her M.S. diagnosis—and it's related to the lack of stylish clothing available to disabled people. It might sound frivolous, but to Blair, who has always used clothes as

a form of self-expression, it is a matter of identity. When *Cruel Intentions* and *Legally Blonde* opened in theaters, in the pre-stylist era of Hollywood, Blair's inherent sense of style made her a muse for fashion brands like Stella McCartney and Marc Jacobs. Karl Lagerfeld chose her as a face of Chanel in 2005, photographing her himself. Blair has had a difficult time adapting her style for M.S. functionality and has been dreaming up a solution: "I would like to partner with someone like Christian Siriano on a line for everyone—not just people who necessarily need adaptive clothing, but for those who want comfort, too. It can still be chic. You shouldn't have to sacrifice style. Like, let's get elastic waistbands to look a little bit better."

Then there are the challenges of canes. "I bought an acrylic cane that was very Miami 1980—kind of fabulous and horrible," Blair tells me. "But the problem with an acrylic cane with M.S. is that you drop the fucker. If it's acrylic, I'm like, 'Oh my God. My cane just shattered and it's everywhere.'"